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RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 06 SINGAPORE 000401

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STATE PASS AID, STATE FOR G/TIP, G, INL, DRL, PRM, AND
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TAGS: KCRM PHUM KWMN SMIG KRFD ASEC PREF ELAB SN
SUBJECT: SINGAPORE: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP) REPORT
SUBMISSION (PART 1 OF 3)

REF: STATE 202745

¶1. (U) This is the first of three messages relaying Embassy Singapore's 2007 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report submission. The Embassy point of contact is:

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¶2. (U) Per the request in para 26 of Reftel, to date the Embassy has spent the following time on the TIP report: COM: 3 hours; FE-MC: 5 hours; FS-2: 10 hours; FS-2: 160 hours.

¶3. (U) Begin text of submission:

¶II. OVERVIEW

-- A. Is the country a country of origin, transit, or destination for internationally trafficked men, women, or children? Provide, where possible, numbers or estimates for each group; how they were trafficked, to where, and for what purpose. Does the trafficking occur within the country's borders? Does it occur in territory outside of the government's control (e.g. in a civil war situation)? Are any estimates or reliable numbers available as to the extent or magnitude of the problem? What is (are) the source(s) of available information on trafficking in persons or what plans are in place (if any) to undertake documentation of trafficking? How reliable are the numbers and these sources? Are certain groups of persons more at risk of being trafficked (e.g. women and children, boys versus girls, certain ethnic groups, refugees, etc.)?

Singapore is a destination country for a limited number of women and girls trafficked for the purpose of prostitution and, in rare instances, foreign domestic workers who voluntarily come to Singapore to work but are subsequently subjected to conditions that may rise to the level of trafficking. Singapore is not a country of origin for trafficked persons, either for sex or labor. There is no internal trafficking in persons. Post is not aware of any cases of trafficking victims transiting through Singapore. Singapore authorities do not consistently screen the several million transit passengers who pass through the transit lounge at Changi Airport each year. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials at post do not believe Singapore is a major hub for people smuggling, a circumstance that further reduces the likelihood that there are a large

number of undetected trafficking victims in transit.

There are no numerical estimates of the magnitude of trafficking in Singapore. The number of cases that the Embassy has identified through discussions with the government, NGOs, and foreign Embassy consular contacts is under 100; however, given that Singapore has a sizable sex industry (prostitution per se is not illegal), it is possible that the total number of victims exceeds 100. Estimates of the numbers of women who may have been trafficked are based primarily on police interviews with women involved in the sex trade and anecdotal evidence of local NGOs. While these organizations are reliable, they rely heavily on voluntary disclosure by victims, and may therefore underestimate the number of persons trafficked. Most NGOs, government contacts, source country consular officials, and U.S. law enforcement officials working in Singapore agree that the overall number of trafficking victims is probably small.

-- B. Please provide a general overview of the trafficking situation in the country and any changes since the last TIP Report (e.g. changes in direction). Also briefly explain the political will to address trafficking in persons. Other items to address may include: What kind of conditions are the victims trafficked into? Which populations are targeted by the traffickers? Who are the traffickers? What methods are used to approach victims? (Are they offered lucrative jobs, sold by their families, approached by friends of friends, etc.?) What methods are used to move the victims (e.g., are false documents being used?).

Local NGOs say that the number of trafficking victims in 2006 may have declined compared to 2005, due to a decrease in the number of foreign prostitutes in Singapore. The local NGOs

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say the immigration authorities are allowing fewer foreign prostitutes to enter the country, particularly from China, and have enhanced anti-vice enforcement in non-traditional "red light" areas. In June, the police announced tougher regulations for massage parlors, requiring them to, inter alia, register with the police, conduct their business in full view of the public, and cease having their employees solicit business. The new measures came after public complaints about massage parlors' opening in public housing estates, outside of traditional "red light" areas. At the same time, however, the GOS reported that 60 females under the age of 18 were arrested for prostitution, up from 48 in 2005. (Note: Post has requested more detailed data from the Ministry of Home Affairs on arrests for prostitution. End Note.)

Nearly all of the known or suspected trafficking cases in 2006 involved sex trafficking, in part because of vigorous government efforts to better protect domestic workers. None of the sex trafficking victims appears to have been confined by the traffickers or subjected to physical violence. Consular officials from Embassies of source countries report that the cases they encounter usually involve women who come to Singapore voluntarily to work in the sex trade or elsewhere who then face some sort of coercion, usually psychological, not physical, by agents or pimps. Typical stories involve women who were told they could find jobs here in a restaurant or bar, but arrived to find that legitimate work was not available or paid very poorly. Now alone in Singapore, and often having borrowed money for their travel expenses, they do not want to or cannot go home empty handed, and enter the sex trade either of their own volition or at the urging of a recruiter. Consular officers and NGOs report that few such women are physically threatened or abused. For the few maids who face severe abuse that may rise to the level of trafficking, all come to Singapore willingly to work but are ultimately exploited by their employers -- through nonpayment of wages, illegal confinement, and physical or psychological abuse.

The Government of Singapore is committed to combating trafficking in persons, as it is committed to stamping out all kinds of organized crime and corruption. Singapore leaders place great stress on achieving a very low crime rate and maintaining extremely tight immigration controls. Singapore has strengthened its already tough immigration controls since 2001. While it adopted these controls primarily for security reasons and to prevent a large influx of undocumented workers, the controls also effectively serve to prevent large-scale trafficking in persons into Singapore. Singapore also has allowed employers to legally bring in large numbers of domestic and unskilled workers, and at relatively low wages (Singapore does not impose a minimum wage); with ready access to inexpensive foreign labor through legal channels, few employers wish to risk draconian penalties by hiring illegal employees or exploiting trafficking victims.

At the 2007 ASEAN Summit in Cebu, which Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong attended, Singapore endorsed the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. Under the Declaration, receiving states are obligated to intensify efforts to protect the fundamental human rights, promote the welfare and uphold the dignity of migrant workers; promote fair and appropriate employment protection, payment of wages, and adequate access to decent working and living conditions for migrant workers; and provide migrant workers who may be victims of discrimination, abuse, exploitation, or violence with adequate access to the legal and judicial system.

Local NGOs report that the Police, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), and Ministry of Manpower (MOM) have continued to increase their efforts to work in concert with them and other civic groups to promote public education about trafficking (through school programs and publicity campaigns, for example) and to improve enforcement efforts. One NGO reported that the MCYS Minister encouraged them to submit a proposal for a shelter and the GOS would provide the facility. NGO contacts and consular officials here say the authorities fully investigate any allegations of trafficking and are anxious to prosecute traffickers. In fact, a common complaint is that investigations are so thorough that they often take months,

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requiring witnesses and victims to remain in Singapore. The consensus among Embassy contacts in civil society and diplomatic circles is that Singapore is willing to devote whatever resources are necessary to combating these crimes.

-- C. What are the limitations on the government's ability to address this problem in practice? For example, is funding for police or other institutions inadequate? Is overall corruption a problem? Does the government lack the resources to aid victims?

The government has both the will and the resources to combat trafficking in persons; the largest limitations on its ability to address the problem are the generally uncooperative nature of the victims and the difficulty of obtaining evidence. Overall, the Police, NGOs, and source-country embassies tell us that the women involved in prostitution do not often allege force or coercion. The vast majority of the women do not face any criminal or immigration charges and generally choose to tell the Police they were acting of their own free will in order to be allowed to return home immediately rather than remain in Singapore for months. When women do allege trafficking, they are often not able to provide many details about their traffickers, and the police and NGOs tell us that their stories are often difficult to verify, particularly when contradicted by their coworkers. Also, the trafficking rings themselves do not appear to be physically present in Singapore, but operate out of source countries with (at most) a few low-level agents or pimps present in Singapore. As a result, the actual

traffickers are generally beyond the reach of the Singapore Police. Some embassies remove victims from Singapore to pursue an investigation in the source country rather than press charges in Singapore.

-- D. To what extent does the government systematically monitor its anti-trafficking efforts (on all fronts -- prosecution, prevention and victim protection) and periodically make available, publicly or privately and directly or through regional/international organizations, its assessments of these anti-trafficking efforts?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) keeps extensive records on persons passing through border checkpoints, as well as records on all detentions, arrests, investigations, prosecutions and convictions, and publishes an annual report on crime in the first quarter of each year. More detailed information on crime statistics is available upon request; local NGOs tell us that MHA has been forthcoming in response to their requests for such information. The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) keeps records on all allegations of maid abuse and the outcomes of their investigations, as well as other violations of the regulations governing employment of foreign workers. MOM makes information on abuse allegations and prosecutions as well as violations by employment agencies available on its website. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports keeps records on all cases where it has provided access to shelter or medical or psychological care.

II. PREVENTION

-- A. Does the government acknowledge that trafficking is a problem in the country? If not, why not?

The government of Singapore acknowledges that a small number of the foreign prostitutes in Singapore have probably been forced or coerced into the sex trade. The government also acknowledges that it continues to have a maid-abuse problem. Although it prosecutes all cases of abuse, it does not classify severe cases of abuse as trafficking. The GOS's assessment -- shared by this Embassy -- is that trafficking in persons is not widespread. Authorities remain vigilant and continue to take actions that directly or indirectly reduce the likelihood of trafficking. The government also does not describe as "trafficking" some cases that we would so classify: these cases include 16- and 17-year olds wittingly and willingly engaged in prostitution, and "work disputes" involving women who entered Singapore for the purpose of prostitution. Despite these definitional differences, the government prosecutes the vice operators involved in these cases when it has prosecution witnesses. As part of a comprehensive revision of the Penal Code, the government will raise the age of consent for commercial sex

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to 18. The government has indicated that the revisions will be submitted to Parliament in the first half of 2007.

-- B. Which government agencies are involved in anti-trafficking efforts and which agency, if any, has the lead?

Singapore's Immigration and Checkpoints Authority controls the borders and looks for illegal immigrants, including trafficking victims, and for persons who employ or harbor illegal immigrants.

The police monitor the sex industry, including through the use of informants, street patrols (uniformed and undercover), and electronic surveillance. They interview women detained for public solicitation and pimps (both public solicitation and pimping are illegal) and look for coercion. Police also investigate allegations or suspicions of maid abuse. Until shortly before trial, the police are responsible for law enforcement-related interaction with witnesses in criminal cases, including trafficking-related ones.

The Attorney General's Chambers prosecutes both trafficking and domestic abuse cases.

The Ministry of Manpower investigates complaints by foreign workers about pay or working conditions, attempts to resolve problems through mediation or enforcement action, works with employment agencies to improve business practices and encourage the industry to police itself, and carries out education efforts among both employers and employees.

The Ministry of Community Development, Youth, and Sports assists victims with counseling and obtaining temporary shelter, if required, and is involved in public education campaigns to raise awareness of trafficking crimes such as child prostitution.

-- C. Are there, or have there been, government-run anti-trafficking information or education campaigns? If so, briefly describe the campaign(s), including their objectives and effectiveness. Do these campaigns target potential trafficking victims and/or the demand for trafficking (e.g. "clients" of prostitutes or beneficiaries of forced labor)?

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) has continued and expanded its information campaign that aims to raise awareness among foreign workers, including maids, of their rights and the resources available to them. Since February 2006, it has printed information on employees' rights and police hotline numbers for maids on prepaid phone cards (popular with foreign workers). In October 2006, MOM started a newsletter that is mailed directly to foreign domestic workers. The newsletter includes information on their rights and responsibilities, as well as on the importance of workplace safety. In December 2006, MOM mailed an information booklet to employers of foreign domestic workers which explained their rights and responsibilities and noted the criminal penalties that can and have been imposed in cases of abuse. In addition, the government highlights Singapore's tough laws against abuse of domestics or harboring illegal immigrants. Government-linked media run regular features on domestic worker abuse and exploitation and widely publicize convictions. Prominent examples include an employer who was sentenced in October 2006 to nine months in jail for scalding and hitting her maid and another employer who was sentenced in February 2007 to one year and nine months in jail for physically abusing her maid. Public shaming is considered a significant part of the justice system's punishment and deterrence efforts; NGO contacts say that press coverage given to abuse cases and other foreign worker issues, combined with Singapore's regulations and efforts to publicize those regulations, has had a positive impact on the welfare of the foreign workers here.

-- D. Does the government support other programs to prevent trafficking? (e.g., to promote women's participation in economic decision-making or efforts to keep children in school.) Please explain.

This question seems addressed to countries that are origin countries for trafficking victims; Singapore is not a victim origin country. Singapore has a first-world economy and has legally protected women's equal rights to education, employment and independence since 1961. Education is

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compulsory.

-- E. What is the relationship between government officials, NGOs, other relevant organizations and other elements of civil society on the trafficking issue?

Civil society organizations involved in combating trafficking in persons indicate that they continue to enjoy excellent access and working relations with government agencies, most notably the Police, Ministry of Manpower (MOM), and the

Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS). This includes access at senior levels, up to and including ministers. As noted above, the MCYS Minister encouraged one organization to submit a proposal to establish a shelter and agreed that the government would provide the facility. At the working level, one NGO leader indicated that the police were open and responsive to feedback on trafficking cases and that officers in the Criminal Investigation Department and its Anti-Vice Branch were readily accessible via mobile phone. Several NGO leaders commented favorably on the willingness of the police to investigate allegations of physical abuse of foreign domestic workers and noted that the police treat the workers with an increased level of sensitivity and sympathy.

NGOs that work with sex-trafficking victims say that the police have also consulted with them on several issues, including ways to improve police interviewing techniques and interaction with women who may have been victimized, and have used NGOs information on how pimps and prostitutes operate to successfully crack down on the vice trade. The police have also given the NGOs advice on Singapore laws and tips on the types of information and evidence that are most helpful in police investigations so that the NGO workers can ask the right questions when they encounter potential victims. NGOs working with domestic workers say that MOM consults them on policy changes and takes suggestions seriously, and has implemented those it found to be workable. The government also has excellent relations with the embassies of the various source countries. Multiple foreign embassy officials said that the Singapore authorities actively investigate allegations they bring to the government's attention, whether of sex-trafficking, maid abuse or work permit violations.

-- F. Does the government monitor immigration and emigration patterns for evidence of trafficking? Do law enforcement agencies screen for potential trafficking victims along borders?

Singapore closely monitors its borders for any suspicious behavior or evidence of criminal activities. Singapore has one of the world's toughest immigration regimes, and the Government further stepped up controls after September 11, 2001. These measures act as substantial barriers to illegal immigration and to trafficking in persons as a subset of this problem. Singapore maintains a record of all travelers who enter and exit Singapore, including information on persons they were traveling with and the vehicles they were in. It checks all travelers' information against government-wide lists of prohibited travelers, suspicious persons, and immigration offenders before clearing them. NGOs and source-country consular officials say the Singapore government is attentive to all indications of trafficking and thoroughly investigates when there is evidence of such crimes.

In November 2006, the MOM launched a program of randomly interviewing foreign domestic workers working in Singapore for the first time. The interviews enable MOM to determine how well they have adjusted to their working conditions and to reinforce workers' knowledge of their rights, responsibilities, and work place safety.

-- G. Is there a mechanism for coordination and communication between various agencies, internal, international, and multilateral on trafficking-related matters, such as a multi-agency working group or a task force? Does the government have a trafficking in persons working group or single point of contact? Does the government have a public corruption task force?

There is not a formal anti-trafficking task force; however, Singapore is an efficiently run country and interagency coordination within its small government is generally

excellent. In addition, government agencies cooperate well with foreign diplomatic representatives and NGOs in dealing with the rare cases of trafficking and in implementing measures that prevent trafficking from occurring. There is an independent anti-corruption agency with broad powers, which aggressively pursues cases of possible corruption against government officials and private citizens.

-- H. Does the government have a national plan of action to address trafficking in persons? If so, which agencies were involved in developing it? Were NGOs consulted in the process? What steps has the government taken to disseminate the action plan?

The government does not have a specific national plan of action to address trafficking in persons per se, given the small number of cases and diverse nature of the crimes here. Instead, it gives full authority to various agencies to implement available laws and regulatory tools to combat the various crimes that comprise "trafficking in persons." The government consults with the public on draft legislation and proposed regulatory changes. For example, in November 2006, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) made available for public comment for one month an extensive series of proposed amendments to the Penal Code. The Penal Code is Singapore's primary criminal legislation and underwent its last major review in 1984. The proposed amendments include criminalizing prostitution involving a minor under 18 years of age. In addition, the amendments would extend extra-territorial jurisdiction over Singaporean citizens and permanent residents who purchase or solicit sexual services from minors overseas. The penalty would be imprisonment for a term up to seven years and/or a fine. To further help combat child sex tourism, the proposed amendments also make organizing or promoting child sex tours a criminal offense. The penalty would be imprisonment for a term up to 10 years and/or a fine. After the Ministry reviews public feedback on the proposed changes to the Penal Code, MHA expects to table the amendments in Parliament in the first half of 2007.

HERBOLD